

## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK



Dear Members,

February was a hectic month for me, as I spent most of it travelling. In the first week, I was in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan; in the second week, I visited Gir National Park in Gujarat; and in the third week, I travelled to Cambodia.

I am pleased to share that BNHS's grassland conservation work in Rajasthan, under the leadership of Dr Sujit Narwade, is bringing about significant changes on the ground. Gir National Park has made remarkable progress over the past decade in community-based lion conservation, e-surveillance for wildlife tourism, and monitoring the dispersing lion population. Additionally, initiatives such as tagging the lesser florican and other species have set an example for other states to learn from and replicate. Today, the lion population has reached 674, spreading across the Greater Gir landscape, including Saurashtra, from Amreli to Porbandar and finally to Barda WLS, which was the original home of the Asiatic lions. However, the true success of lion conservation will be achieved only when they reclaim their historic range outside Gujarat, similar to how tigers have expanded across India.

Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction (SAVE) is a consortium of NGOs working across South Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Cambodia. Led by the UK-based RSPB and BirdLife International, SAVE recently held its annual meeting in Cambodia, where BNHS's groundbreaking work was highly commended by its partners. India remains the only leading country that has successfully bred over 800 Gyps vultures through conservation breeding programmes, released 84 birds into the wild and also banned harmful NSAIDs. In contrast, Pakistan has managed to raise only 37 birds, while Nepal has bred fewer than 50 vultures in its conservation centres, which has been stopped now. Bangladesh and Cambodia have not initiated breeding programmes, instead choosing to focus on creating Vulture Safe Zones by eliminating the use of NSAIDs such as diclofenac, ketoprofen, aceclofenac, and nimesulide. Alongside Pakistan and Nepal, these efforts contribute to regional vulture

conservation. India, however, has gone a step further by successfully breeding over 800 vultures, releasing 84, and banning harmful NSAIDs. The country is actively working toward making its entire territory a Vulture Safe Zone.

BNHS has demonstrated that species conservation is possible when governments and expert NGOs collaborate effectively. The efforts to establish India as a Vulture Safe Zone are significantly contributing to the recovery of wild vulture populations. As a result, India now has an estimated 20,000 wild vultures across three Gyps species – the largest population in Asia.

I am excited to share another major milestone. This year, our three conservation breeding centres in Pinjore, Bhopal, and Rani (Assam) successfully produced 105 eggs, out of which around 59 have hatched (27 WRV, 25 LBV, and 7 SBV). This is the highest recorded success in the past 20 years in India. Our centres will now build the capacity of other stakeholders in India and internationally who are interested in vulture conservation breeding programmes. Additionally, the vulture release programme will be extended this year to Kaziranga Tiger Reserve in Assam and Melghat Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra.

During my visit to Rajasthan, I was delighted to meet the dynamic Chief Wildlife Warden, Ms Shikha Mehra (IFS), who approved several long-pending BNHS proposals. This means that our conservation vision for Rajasthan will be strengthened through collaboration with the Forest Department.

Furthermore, the BNHS marine conservation team recently conducted a workshop in Ratnagiri as part of a series of workshops planned along the west coast to address marine megafauna stranding. Special thanks to Vice Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan, for facilitating a dedicated workshop for officers of the Indian Navy's Western Command in Mumbai. Rear Admiral Anil Jaggi, Flag Officer Commanding (Maharashtra Naval Area), commended BNHS's efforts and assured greater support from the Navy in marine conservation and climate change mitigation efforts.

BNHS's bird banding and tagging programme continues to yield valuable observations. This month, Dr P. Sathiyaselvam and his team tagged two bar-headed geese at Nagi Dam in Jamui District, Bihar.

BNHS has also made significant progress in improving its publications. I encourage you to check the "Systema naturae" section in the latest *Hornbill* magazine and consider contributing your observations to the BNHS 150-year Omnibus Collection.

Lastly, if you have not yet completed the online form for the publication of the Yearbook for Life Members, please click here to submit your information: <https://forms.gle/12gPTSyTs9P2khue7>. For

assistance, please contact BNHS Central Marketing ([cmd@bnhs.org](mailto:cmd@bnhs.org)), Membership ([membership@bnhs.org](mailto:membership@bnhs.org)), Programmes ([programmes@bnhs.org](mailto:programmes@bnhs.org)), or the Conservation Education Centre ([cec-mumbai@bnhs.org](mailto:cec-mumbai@bnhs.org)). For event reservations or submissions, feel free to reach out via email, and do not forget to send event photos and brief write-ups to Mr Gopi Naidu ([g.naidu@bnhs.org](mailto:g.naidu@bnhs.org)).

Thank you for staying connected. I am always reachable at [director@bnhs.org](mailto:director@bnhs.org).

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